

Word of Grace Bible Church

Foundational Principles of Faith, Ministry, and Leadership

Preamble

Why do we do what we do?

In historic and modern Christianity, there have existed and still exist various models for approaching church ministry. Examples include:

- The church as a place for the performance of sacraments
- The church as a place for carrying out liturgical ministry
- The church as a place for the emotional and psychological support of those who attend
- The church as a place for charitable outreach
- The church as a place for affirming traditions or cultural distinctions
- The church as a place for entertainment

From this, the model for ministry we choose will depend highly on what we do and how we do it. Word of Grace Bible Church is built upon several critical principles which are clearly seen in the Holy Scriptures. These principles comprise an operational working plan, according to which the ministers of this church practically carry out ministry.

We, the ministers of Word of Grace Bible Church, believe the Holy Scriptures delegate the following tasks to the church:

Eph. 4:11-16 ¹¹ *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,* ¹² *for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,* ¹³ *till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;* ¹⁴ *that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,* ¹⁵ *but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—* ¹⁶ *from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

This text shows us several very important principles with regard to how the Church should function:

- The core task for ministers consists of building up the church¹.
- The process of building up the church is carried out only through intentional and constructive ministry by every member of the church.
- The unequivocal task for ministers is the equipping of the saints for ministry.
- Such equipping of the saints consists of the following:
 - The achievement of spiritual growth and reinforcement of spiritual maturity of each church member. Specific examples include:
 - Growth in knowing Christ

¹ The word “church” refers to a local body of believers (see Ephesians 4:15-16), not to a church building or denomination.

- Growth in the formation of the character of Christ
- Growth in maturity (confidence, practical conviction)
- Growth in love for other people
- Growth in the ability to speak the truth in love
- Growth in one's own commitment to Christ
- The acquisition of experience in practical ministry

It is impossible for the church to be edified merely by one pastor or only the ministers. This work can be completed only by members of the entire church body.

Foundational Principles of Ministry – General Strategy of the Church

Our philosophy of ministry reflects a defined model for the development of the church. In our view, this model reflects to the greatest extent possible the teaching of the Bible on building up of the church as applied to today's current conditions!

This philosophy helps us to see clearly and objectively our mission and goal in its practical implementation.

Our Mission

We stand on the position of God-centeredness with faithfulness to the Scriptures and Biblical preaching. As such, our mission is to conduct ministry in such a manner that it enhances to the utmost our worship before God, the transformation of our character into that of Jesus Christ, and ministry to one another. This mission ultimately should build up the church, lead to the preaching of the Gospel to the nations, and bring praise to the Great and Sovereign God.

Our Goal

To foster mature and joyous children of God who will build up the church and influence the world.

When every member of our church has a clear understanding of the mission and goal of our ministry, each individual member then can contribute toward the ministry of the church at large in the most effective manner. Every decision in any area of ministry is made in light of the criterion that such a decision conforms to our mission and helps us to achieve our goal.

Some people believe that merely holding to a firm conviction in the church's mission, goal, and philosophy of ministry automatically leads to pride and elevation of self above other people. Since we recognize this danger exists, we do everything possible in order to cultivate in our midst an atmosphere of humility and a spirit of ministry to one another.

We are open, we are sincere. We do not claim to know more than anyone else, including areas such as building up the church and the development of God's work. Indeed, we have no desire to foster an attitude that puffs ourselves up over others.

We see several strong reasons why we hold to this position of a God-centered vision:

- Such a position reflects our current beliefs based on searching Scripture in sincerity and humility before God. We believe this position of a God-centered vision most faithfully reflects the dominant theme of the Bible.

It is not our intention to belittle the philosophy of others who are God's children and hold to any philosophy of worship different than ours. We do not claim to be smarter or holier than others. The issue is not about comparing people or their abilities. Rather, the issue centers on how we can most faithfully obey the truth of Holy Scriptures on the question of properly defining the correct basis for life and ministry.

It is necessary for us to test whether our deeds and actions conform faithfully to God's will. One way our church does this is by comparing numerous positions and approaches to the development of the church to that which we know today. We recognize that we are merely servants who by ourselves have nothing to offer. Keeping this humility in mind, we seek to submit ourselves to the position that we understand best reflects the practical application of the truth of Holy Scriptures in the area of building up the church.

Holding to this position, we firmly stand on it. We are convinced of it. We do not belittle people who hold to other positions. We strive to love all of God's children. But, having said all this, unless we were to see convincing evidence to the contrary of our position, we are unable to consider conflicting positions held by others as equally valid to those we believe. If we were to contradict our own beliefs, it would amount to a lack of principles or even open deception on our part.

- This position brings measurable practical results.

We thank God that He gives us the opportunity to see practical results from His activity in the life of our church. By God's mercy, for the past eight years, the church has obtained stability, depth, and inner righteousness, yet also being dynamic in its development.

During these years, God has permitted our church to become His instrument. He has performed the salvation of hundreds of perishing souls. He has healed dozens of disintegrating or broken families and lives. He has built up an effective ministry to young people. He has developed and implemented a serious and practical attitude toward shepherding in our church. Additionally, He has risen up dozens of ministry workers capable of being responsible for other souls and thus having created a system of leadership that works. All these blessings, and many others, are the direct result of this philosophy of ministry.

I. Fundamental principles

The main principle upon which our ministry is built consists of a God-centered vision - the recognition of the reality of God in creation and in life.

There are two reasons why we consider a God-centered worldview absolutely necessary for our lives.

- The world in fact is God-centered.

We are born into a world which was not built by us. God never asked human beings how physical and moral laws of the creation should function. He created them based upon His own perfect will.

The world is ruled by God. God is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. No one can advise God what He should do.

- A God-centered vision is the only way that allows people to achieve real spiritual growth.

Speaking of the process of spiritual growth, we encounter the necessity for people to truly change. Every person in and of himself or herself is self-centered and has no desire to change.

Human methods for changing people are very weak. In the realm of man-centered religion, we find the following tools invented by men:

- Traditions – “We have always done it this way.”
- Legalism or an authoritarian system that rely on the fear of punishment.
- Intellectual convictions built upon the rational cognition of facts by the human mind that is distorted by its condition of rebellion against God.
- Mysticism – spiritual “displays of enlightenment” and superstitious fear of the mysterious.
- Manipulation of one’s mind or conscience
 - Psychological approaches
 - Marketing principles
 - Social methods of action

All such methods yield results that are temporary, weak, and do not last for a long time – for such methods are not based upon the Bible.

The only power which is capable of effecting true change in a person is God. Worship before the great God is the only true condition from which a person can begin his or her process of spiritual growth.

Thus, this position of God dominating the center of all things is based upon the practical worship of the absolute, great, and all-powerful God. This God-centered position presents us with the only reliable and effective way to engage in the process of salvation and spiritual growth.

A. The absolute dominion, or sovereignty, of God

All that we do in the church, including our approach to ministry, how we work with people, how we conceive strategy, etc. stems from a deep conviction in God’s perfect dominion over the whole world.

This fact is the foundation of the entire Judeo-Christian worldview. It dominates in God’s revelation about Himself. The first four of the Ten Commandments focus on the importance for people to recognize God’s absolute authority and to bow down before Him. This truth was summarized in the well-known expression called the great “Shma”:

Deut. 6:4-5 ⁴ *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!* ⁵ *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.*

This very truth is the basic message of salvation preached in the New Testament. As he was speaking to people who did not know God, the Gentiles in Athens, the Apostle Paul begins his account of salvation with an explanation of the reality of God.

Acts 17:24-26 ²⁴ *God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.* ²⁵ *Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.* ²⁶ *And He has made from one blood^[c] every nation of men to*

dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings...

God's sovereignty is the foundation for the existence of the creation and everything that exists within it. God is the rational, logical, and moral center of creation.

Romans 11:33-36 ³³ *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!* ³⁴ *“For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?”* ³⁵ *“Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?”* ³⁶ *For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.*

B. The absolute authority, sufficiency, clarity, and accessibility of God's Word

We believe that the Scriptures are written clearly. The basic principles connected with salvation and Christian life as presented in the Word of God allow us to clearly understand their meaning.

Questions of faith and life for every church member, and for church ministry in general, are established solely upon the principles of the Holy Scriptures. Indeed, the Scriptures hold the highest position of authority in the church.

The Holy Scriptures in their historical-grammatical interpretation present sufficient and objective information for a person to be sanctified by God's will in regards to all areas of life.

2 Tim. 3:16-17 ¹⁶ *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,* ¹⁷ *that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

We believe that the Holy Scriptures are necessary and sufficient:

- For spiritual rebirth (James 1:18)
- For spiritual growth (1 Peter 2:1-2)
- For sanctification (John 17:17)
- For a life full of spiritual abundance (John 8:32)
- For preparation for ministry (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
- For the building and development of the church (1 Tim. 3:15)

During the years of the Reformation, this principle was expressed by the phrase “Sola Scriptura” (or “Scripture alone”). It asserts that the Scriptures in their very origin and nature possess absolute godly qualities – righteousness, objectivity, authority, and sufficiency for salvation and righteous living. These qualities to the utmost extent are not possessed in any other method of communicating God's revelation.

We strive to do everything possible to allow the Scriptures, not ideas invented by men, to actually govern our standards, decisions, and lives. This pertains not only to practical aspects of every Christian's life, but it is also relevant to our approach to church leadership, organization of all areas of ministry, selection of methods, and practical decisions. We believe that every question of life and ministry has a direct or indirect objective answer in Holy Scripture. Psychology, pragmatism, philosophy, political and economic interests, mysticism,

social science, and other man-invented instruments for the formation of ideological values can never provide any foundation for defining truth and its application to life and ministry.

Truth is contained in a definable and objective form in the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, whenever we face a decision regarding any question of faith and life, including all questions pertaining to church ministry and its methods, our first job is to define the Bible's position on that issue. Further, we do everything possible to be faithful in practice to the truth found in Scripture by submitting to its teachings in all of our decisions and actions.

C. The undistorted, clear, and authoritative preaching of God's Word

Based upon the extraordinarily important role of Scripture, we make all efforts to ensure that the Word of God is preached in the church without alteration, clearly, and with authority.

God warns about this many times both in the Old and New Testaments.

Jer. 23:28-31 ²⁸ *"The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?" says the LORD.* ²⁹ *"Is not My word like a fire?" says the LORD, "And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"* ³⁰ *"Therefore behold, I am against the prophets," says the LORD, "who steal My words every one from his neighbor.* ³¹ *Behold, I am against the prophets," says the LORD, "who use their tongues and say, 'He says.'*

In the New Testament, Paul particularly emphasizes that in the last days, people will not love truth. For this reason, many preachers face the temptation to compromise their preaching content in order to appeal to people's whims.

2 Tim. 4:1-4 ¹ *I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom:* ² *Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.* ³ *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;* ⁴ *and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*

This defines the role of preaching and our relationship to it in our church. This is the reason why our church practices pastoral ministry, in which the central place is occupied by pastoral preaching.

Besides preaching in the church, pastors must also explicate Biblical truths, in the light of their practical significance in the life of every discrete person, on the level of their individual pastoral ministry with church members. This is the reason for such extensive emphasis on pastoral ministry.

II. Critical goals

These fundamental principles comprise the basis for building authentic Christian living.

The essence of that which we are building on this basis consists of the transformation of the personal lives of each Christian into the likeness and character of Jesus Christ.

This is accomplished by the following steps.

A. Personal worship before God

The only rational and correct response of people in relation to the Great and Absolute God, the Ruler of heaven and earth, is humble worship before Him, submission to His power, and readiness for heartfelt obedience to Him.

The accomplishment of this reaction is the first near-term goal of our ministry. Worship of God has two basic components:

1. Worship in salvation

When a person accepts the Gospel, this results in that person's spiritual rebirth (being "born again" in John 3). This is the first step toward the worship of God. It consists of:

- a. Recognition of God's sovereignty (Acts 17:24-7)
- b. Recognition of one's own poverty and depravity (Rm. 3:10-2)
- c. Recognition of the substitutionary atonement of Christ (Rm. 3:20-6)
- d. Recognition of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (Acts 16:31, Mt. 16:24)
- e. Practical trust of one's own life to Christ (2 Cor. 5:16)

2. Worship in spiritual growth

This consists of the constant and continuous process of dying to one's self and transformation into the glorious likeness of Jesus Christ. This process of attaining true happiness and peace in the heart of the Christian includes the following steps:

- a. The transformation of thinking and submission of one's life to Christ (Rm. 12:1-2)
- b. The acquisition of knowledge of God and confidence in Him (Col. 1:9-11)
- c. The transformation for the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18)

Each element of the spiritual development of a Christian is inextricably linked with the Christian's practical submission before God and dying to one's self. Without this authentic and constantly transforming process of humiliating one's heart, it is impossible to experience true joy in God and true ministry to Him.

B. Practical holiness – a life reflecting the character of Jesus Christ

Practical holiness is a real and natural result of worshiping God, humility before Him, and ministry to Him.

Romans 6:22 ²² *But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.*

Standing on the foundation of God's absolute dominion based on the authority of His word, which ought to be clearly and consistently proclaimed in church, every Christian, who in reality has life in God within oneself, naturally strives increasingly more to fulfill God's will in one's own thoughts, feelings, desires, and practical living.

1 Peter 1:14-17 ¹⁴ ...as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; ¹⁵ but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." ¹⁷ And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear...

The result and practical standard for measuring a Christian's growth in holiness is one's conforming to the character of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 4:19 ¹⁹ My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you...

This growth in holiness comprises the second near-term goal of our ministry, which naturally follows from the first goal.

C. The ministry of building up souls and the church

Every Christian can minister to God only to the extent that one's heart is truly worshipping God, as well as the extent to which the Christian enjoys progress in the transformation of one's own character to that of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 3:15 ¹⁵ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear...

The building up of individual souls and the church at large constitutes the main goal of every form of ministry. This goal encompasses everything that is done in the church.

Ephesians 4:16 ¹⁶ ...from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

The redemption and building up of the Church was the main purpose why Jesus Christ came to the earth. The local church is the fundamental earthly expression of the church globally. Thus, the ministry of every Christian must be implemented in the context of the local church and contribute to its development and growth.

The most important ministry in which every member of the church must be involved consists of using one's own personal influence to build up others. This includes personal concern about the spiritual condition of people around them. This influence is established in the practical application of Biblical truths taught in the church through preaching, Bible classes, and individual shepherding.

Flowing from the Biblical order of the design of the church, in order to be effective in personal discipleship and developing ministry workers in today's circumstances, our church has home Bible groups. The pastors of these home groups with their assistants provide direct shepherding to each church member. This shepherding must conform to the general goals of building up the Church through helping people to grow in ministry. The practical influence of building up one another is the instrument used to carry this out.

Therefore, active participation in home groups is essential for every church member.

III. Strategic responsibility

Every Christian and church has the responsibility to spread the practical influence of God's truth into the world around them.

Such influence is possible only through the presence within each individual Christian of an authentic spiritual life. Such life comes from the Christian's submission to the absolute authority of God's Word, worship before Him, involvement in the true process of transforming one's own character to Christ, and the presence of a heart for edifying souls and the church.

We are incapable of attracting people to God. This is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit. However, we are responsible only for availing ourselves to God's use. When we obey Him, He can use us as His instruments for spreading the influence of His Kingdom.

This strategic responsibility according to the Scriptures is expressed in several key areas. They define the practice of our evangelistic and missionary ministry.

A. The influence of the Christian life (1 Pet. 2:11-2, 3:15-6)

First of all, our task is to live and reflect the perfections of God's character in our practical earthly lives.

1 Peter 2:9 ⁹ *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...*

This is life in God. It practically manifests itself in the Christian, and to a great extent defines the success of our influence on people around us. It allows people to truly see how life in God differs from everything worldly.

1 Peter 2:11-12 ¹¹ *Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,* ¹² *having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

Without the presence of this life, any effort at evangelism degrades into propaganda deprived of power and effectiveness.

B. Personal evangelism

Additionally, we believe that every Christian must be familiar with the fundamentals of one's faith and have the capability of clearly, accessibly, and in the right condition of heart to explain them to people who want to know about them.

1 Peter 3:15 ¹⁵ *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear...*

Personal evangelism has its goal not only to proclaim the truth of the Gospel. It also helps another person to see the Gospel's significance in the context of his or her own life, particularly in defining one's own proper

relationship to the Gospel. Sharing the Gospel with another person might enable that person to become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 28:19-20 ¹⁹ *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* ²⁰ *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.*

Our goal is not simply to attract a person to recite “the Sinner’s Prayer”. Rather, the goal is to achieve radical change in a person’s inner world, as expressed by the Greek work “metanoia”. The presence of this change is affirmed by the fact that a person has accepted the lordship of Jesus Christ and has become His humble disciple who abides in His Word. This defines our approach as to whom and when we can truly consider someone to be a believer. Once God reveals to us that a person has truly become a believer, we affirm that truth through administering the external Biblical act of water baptism.

C. Missionary ministry (Mt. 28:19-20, Acts 1:8)

The concluding element to the strategic vision of our church is found in our missionary ministry.

The ministry of missions is commanded by God. His main task is the spreading of the saving truth of the Gospel in those places which still lack churches.

Acts 1:8 ⁸ *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

Such work demands that missionaries are disciples of Jesus Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, and having the power to spread God’s influence amongst other people who do not know God.

This condition is possible only when every missionary submits to God’s dominion. He lives in submission to His authoritative Word and grows in his transformation into the likeness of Christ. He has practical habits in ministry for building up others’ souls. He reflects the Gospel in his life and can effectively share the Good News with other people.

Word of Grace Bible Church sees its primary task in planting new churches which function on the foundation of principles of ministry, on which our church operates. For the moment, our church has been unable to get involved in this task directly. However, Word of Grace Bible Church participates in the spreading of Biblical influence through the broadcast and distribution of Biblical sermons (in media ministry via Internet), preparation of ministry workers, and support ministry of existing churches in other countries that unite with us in our beliefs of faith and share our principles of ministry.